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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2080
INFO NSC WASHDC
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY LIMA
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
JOINT STAFF WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
DIRONDCP WASHDC
AMEMBASSY HANOI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 005460

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/18/11
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SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT/FARC BEGIN HUMANITARIAN
EXCHANGE/FARC MANIPULATES EVENT

¶1. CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR ANNE W. PATTERSON. REASONS:
1.5(C,D).

¶2. (U) ON JUNE 16, THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE FARC BEGAN THE PLANNED EXCHANGE OF CAPTURED SOLDIERS AND POLICEMEN FOR IMPRISONED FARC GUERRILLAS WITH THE FARC RELEASE OF 29 POLICEMEN AND SOLDIERS AND THE GOC RELEASE OF 11 FARC GUERRILLAS. ON JUNE 17, THE FARC RELEASED AN ADDITIONAL FOUR POLICEMEN IN A SEPARATE CEREMONY. BY JUNE 18, A TOTAL OF 47 SOLDIERS AND POLICEMEN HAD BEEN RELEASED. THE NEXT STEP IS FOR THE FARC TO UNILATERALLY RELEASE SOME 100 ADDITIONAL POLICEMEN/SOLDIERS IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE. MANY OF THE RELEASED POLICEMEN AND SOLDIERS HAD BEEN HELD BY THE FARC SINCE THEIR CAPTURE DURING THE DISASTROUS ARMY AND POLICE DEFEATS AT MIRAFLORES AND MITU (1998) AND PUERTO RICO (1999).

¶3. (C) THE FARC RENEGED ON ITS WORD TO THE GOC THAT IT WOULD KEEP THE EVENT AT A LOW PROFILE BY BRINGING INTERNATIONAL PRESS TO THE RELEASE OF THE SOLDIERS/POLICEMEN AND CREATING A LARGE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA EVENT. ARMED FORCES COMMANDER GEN. FERNANDO TAPIAS CALLED THE FARC MEDIA DISPLAY A "SPECTACLE," AND ADDED THAT THE FARC RELEASE IN NO WAY MADE UP FOR THE INHUMANE, CONCENTRATION-CAMP TYPE CONDITIONS THE SOLDIERS/POLICEMEN WERE HELD IN FOR YEARS. ALTHOUGH MOST RELEASED SOLDIERS/POLICEMEN RESERVED COMMENTS, ONE SOLDIER'S COMMENT THAT THE FARC "TREATED THEM LIKE ANIMALS" WAS WIDELY DISSEMINATED BY THE LOCAL PRESS. (NOTE: EMBASSY SOURCES SAY THAT THE MILITARY HIERARCHY HAD INSISTED TO THE GOC THAT THE EXCHANGES BE DONE VERY LOW KEY TO KEEP THE FARC FROM GAINING POLITICAL MILEAGE FROM THE EVENT. ALTHOUGH THE GOC HAD APPARENTLY REACHED AGREEMENT WITH THE FARC ON THIS ISSUE, THE FARC DID AN END-RUN ON THE GOC BY BRINGING THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS TO COVER THE EVENT. END NOTE.)

¶4. (C) SEPARATELY, OF THE 12 FARC GUERRILLAS WHO WERE DUE FOR RELEASE ALSO ON JUNE 16, ONLY 11 WERE RELEASED WHEN ONE OPTED TO COMPLETE HIS SENTENCE AND LEAVE THE FARC. DESPITE WIDESPREAD SPECULATION THAT THIS GROUP WOULD INCLUDE SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT UPPER AND MID-LEVEL FARC COMMANDERS IN COLOMBIA'S JAILS, NONE OF THE RELEASED BELONGED TO THE FARC POLITICAL OR MILITARY HIERARCHY, AND, IN FACT, MOST WERE NO MORE THAN FOOT SOLDIERS OR LOW-LEVEL URBAN MILITIAS. HOWEVER, MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SOURCES TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 18 THAT THREE OR FOUR ADDITIONAL FARC PRISONERS ARE DUE TO BE RELEASED SOON, AND THAT THIS GROUP MAY CONTAIN SOME HIGHER RANKING FARC MEMBERS.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: PREDICTABLY, THE FARC USED THE HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE TO STAGE A MEDIA SHOW, PROBABLY TO TRY TO REPAIR ITS BADLY-TARNISHED INTERNATIONAL IMAGE. FOR ITS PART, THE GOC DESERVES CREDIT FOR HAVING FOUGHT OFF FARC PRESSURE TO INCLUDE SOME OF THE FARC'S IMPORTANT CADRES AND MORE NOTORIOUS PERPETRATORS OF ACTS OF EXTREME

VIOLENCE AMONG THE RELEASED. HOPEFULLY, GOC PEACE COMMISSIONER CAMILO GOMEZ WILL REJECT ANY ATTEMPT BY THE FARC TO INCLUDE SOME OF THESE INDIVIDUALS IN THE LAST GROUP TO BE RELEASED. ALTHOUGH MOST COLOMBIANS REJOICED OVER THE RELEASE OF THE POLICEMEN/SOLDIERS, AND HOPED FOR MORE RELEASES, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THIS ACT, IN AND OF ITSELF, WILL RENEW GENERAL CONFIDENCE IN THE PEACE PROCESS. THAT MAY ONLY COME IF THE FARC BEGINS SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS ON DOWNGRADING THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE AND COMMITS TO ABIDING BY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW.

PATTERSON

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